



**Australian Government**

**Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs**

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Submission to:

**Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group**

Addressing:

**Part C Competitiveness of Australian agriculture  
and food businesses, Part 6 Education, skills  
and labour supply**

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## Summary

The Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs' (DIMIA) submission to the Agriculture and Food Policy Reference Group covers a wide range initiatives and programs that impact on the labour supply in the Australian agriculture and food sector.

In summary DIMIA's submission covers:

**Language and Cultural Diversity** – cultural and language diversity is one of Australia's greatest resources. A culturally diverse workforce offers specialised knowledge of overseas markets and networking opportunities.

**Skilled Migration** - there are several general skill migration visa options that help address skilled labour shortages in the agricultural sector.

**State/Territory Specific Migration** - includes a number of initiatives designed to help State and Territory governments to address skill shortages. These initiatives are collectively referred to as State Specific Migration Mechanisms. They provide State and Territory governments with the opportunity to influence the number and profile of skilled migrants settling in their areas.

**Business Skills** - visa classes in this category serve the interests of the Australian economy by encouraging successful business people to settle permanently in Australia.

**Working Holiday Makers** – contribute indirect benefits to the Australian economy by travelling widely around Australia, and providing a source of labour for seasonal industries.

**Student and Training Visas** - overseas students who graduate with Australian qualifications are increasingly taking up permanent migration opportunities. The occupational trainee visa allows overseas nationals to undertake a workplace-based training program and from 1 November 2005 apprentices will be able to be recruited from overseas for regional Australia.

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## Language and Cultural Diversity

According to the 2001 Census, 43 per cent of Australia's population was born overseas or had one parent born overseas and approximately 200 different languages are spoken in Australia. This cultural and language diversity is one of Australia's greatest resources. A culturally diverse workforce offers specialised knowledge of overseas markets and networking opportunities, as well as language skills and expertise in cultural protocols for use in exporting, or in marketing to local niche markets. Increasingly, Australian businesses are obtaining a competitive advantage from making greater use of this diversity in their workforce and the marketplace.

"Diversity Works!" Program is part of the Australian Government's multicultural policy, implemented by DIMIA. This program encourages and supports Australian organisations and companies to use the diversity available in their workforce to optimise performance, promote innovation and connect with their broad customer base and business partners and as a key enabler of business success.

The department produces resources such as training materials, and publishes case studies of businesses that are succeeding in using their staff's language skills and their knowledge to expand domestic niche markets, create new product lines and tap into international markets. These resources are available on the Department's Diversity Australia website:  
<[www.diversityaustralia.gov.au](http://www.diversityaustralia.gov.au)>

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## Skilled Migration

There are several General Skilled Migration (GSM) visa options that help to address skilled labour shortages in the agricultural sector. In particular, the Skilled Independent Regional SIR (Provisional) visa which requires the applicant to be sponsored by a State or Territory authority and, if granted their visa to live and work in regional Australia for at least 2 years. This visa category is a recent initiative that was introduced to help to ensure a percentage of Australia's skilled migrant intake goes to address skills shortages in regional Australia.

All individuals interested in applying for skilled migration need to nominate an occupation that is listed on the Skilled Occupations List (SOL) and have their skills assessed by the relevant assessing authority as suitable for working in that occupation. Occupations are added to or removed from the SOL in response to requests received from the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. Currently there are a number of professional and associate professional skilled agricultural occupations listed on the SOL.

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## **State/Territory Specific Migration**

The Australian Government, in consultation with State and Territory governments, has introduced a number of initiatives designed to help State and Territory governments:

- address skill shortages that may exist in their jurisdictions;
- attract overseas business people to establish new or joint ventures; and
- encourage a more balanced settlement of Australia's skilled migrant intake.

These initiatives, described below, are collectively referred to as State Specific Migration Mechanisms (SSMMs). They provide State and Territory governments with the opportunity to influence the number and profile of skilled migrants settling in their areas.

## **Regional Outreach Officers**

To assist regional Australia to respond to its skilled employment needs, the Australian Government established a network of Regional Outreach Officers (ROOs) as part of a 2004-05 Budget initiative. ROOs provide information on State Specific and regional migration initiatives that are designed to help deliver young, English speaking, skilled migrants to regional areas. They liaise with State/Territory and local governments and regional employers to raise awareness of regional migration initiatives and provide information on how they can make use of the initiatives.

## **Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS)**

The Regional Sponsored Migration Scheme (RSMS) began in 1996 to assist employers in regional Australia fill permanent, full time skilled vacancies where they had been unable to do so through the local labour market. The scheme is one of several government initiatives aimed at attracting migrants to regional or low population growth areas of Australia. It is a key element in the Government's effort to ensure that all of Australia gets a fair share of the benefits that flow from skilled migration. DIMIA works in partnership with approximately 50 appointed Regional Certifying Bodies (RCBs). RCBs are a mixture of bodies including State and Territory government departments, Regional Development Boards and Chambers of Commerce. RCBs certify applications from regional employers before they are lodged with DIMIA, to ensure that the nominations are genuine and that the vacancies target skilled occupations needed in the area.

The scheme is available to employers in all areas of Australia except Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong, Melbourne, Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Perth. Registered nurses, general medical practitioners, university lectures and motor mechanics represent the largest occupational categories being sought under the RSMS.

The RSMS provides special concessions for regional Australia.

## **State/Territory Nominated Independent Scheme (STNI)**

The STNI Scheme enables State and Territory governments to sponsor Skilled Independent category applicants who are willing to settle in States and Territories where their skills are in demand. They are normally identified through the Skill Matching Database (see below).

State and Territory governments participating in the scheme establish which skills are in short supply and where skill shortages are occurring, either through a skill audit or other information such as skill shortage assessments undertaken by the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business.

### **Skill Matching Visa**

The Skill Matching visa is designed to link skilled migrants with specific skilled vacancies through STNI and RSMS. The skill matching visa allows applicants to register on the Skill Matching Database which serves as a resource for sponsorship by employers and State and Territory governments.

### **Skill Matching Database**

The Skill Matching Database helps employers locate suitably qualified potential skilled migrants to fill skilled vacancies or skill shortages in Australia. It contains the educational, employment and work details of skilled migrants from nearly 300 trades and professions. It is used by employers under employer sponsored migration categories as well as by State and Territory governments. The Skill Matching Database can be accessed through [www.immi.gov.au/skills](http://www.immi.gov.au/skills).

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## **Business Skills**

The Business Skills visa classes serve the interests of the Australian economy by encouraging successful business people to settle permanently in Australia. Business migrants develop new or existing businesses and develop links with international markets; create or maintain employment in Australia; export Australian goods or services; produce goods or provide services that would otherwise be imported into Australia; introduce new or improved technology; and/or increase commercial activity and competitiveness within sectors of the Australian economy.

## Temporary business 457 Visa

Australian Employers may sponsor overseas skilled workers on a Temporary Business (Long Stay) visa subclass 457. This visa covers a broad range of skilled occupations which are set out in a list. Applicants must have an occupation on that list and employers must pay a minimum salary. The occupations are broadly commensurate with occupational groups of Managers, Professionals, Associate Professionals and Tradespersons. The minimum salary level is based on the annual average salary for all Australians and is currently \$39,100 a year (and \$50,775 for IT professionals).

Special concessions have been provided for regional Australia. Regional Australia is described as all parts of Australia except Perth, Melbourne, Sydney, Wollongong, Newcastle Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Positions at lower salary levels or lower skill levels of intermediate or semi-skilled levels may be approved in regional areas, provided they are endorsed by a Regional Certifying Body. The lower skilled occupations include farm managers, skilled agricultural worker such as farm overseers and shearers, intermediate production and transport workers. Details of Regional Certifying Bodies are available at [www.immi.gov.au/migration/employers/certifying\\_bodies.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/migration/employers/certifying_bodies.htm).

Comprehensive information on the 457 visa is provided in an application booklet "Sponsoring a temporary overseas employee to Australia", available on the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) website at [www.immi.gov.au/allforms/books11.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/books11.htm).

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## Working Holiday Makers

Australia currently has reciprocal Working Holiday arrangements with: the United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, Republic of Ireland, Republic of Korea, Malta, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People's Republic of China, Finland, the Republic of Cyprus, France, Italy, Belgium, Estonia and Taiwan.

The focus of the Working Holiday program is on allowing young people from arrangement countries to have a more meaningful experience of Australia. By staying in Australia for up to a year, and working alongside other Australians, young working holiday makers are able to immerse themselves more fully in the Australian way of life, and in exchange pass on aspects of their own culture to Australians.

Working Holiday makers also contribute indirect benefits to the Australian economy, by travelling widely around Australia, and providing a source of labour for seasonal industries.

The Government recently announced changes to the Working Holiday program aimed specifically at addressing shortages of seasonal labour in regional Australia. From 1 November 2005, working holiday makers who have undertaken at least 3 months seasonal harvest work in regional Australia

will be able to apply for a second working holiday visa. A second working holiday visa would allow working holiday makers to spend a further 12 months holidaying and working in Australia and provides an incentive for a greater number of working holiday makers to participate in seasonal harvest work.

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## **Student and Training Visas**

### **Student Visa Program**

DIMIA has a large student visa program with over 171,000 Student visas granted between 1 July 2003 and 30 June 2004. Student visa holders can apply for permission to work which allows a student to work 20 hours per week while the course is in session, and full-time during holiday periods.

Overseas students who graduate with Australian qualifications are increasingly taking up Australian permanent migration opportunities. DIMIA is continuing to expand the range of choices available to overseas students who successfully complete their studies and wish to remain in Australia.

### **Occupational Trainee Visa**

The Occupational Trainee visa (OTV) allows overseas nationals to undertake a supervised workplace-based training program that is designed to increase their skills/knowledge levels in their occupation, field of study or area of expertise.

Changes to legislation relating to the OTV will be implemented on 1 November 2005 in order to improve access to this visa and provide a skilled migration pathway by:

- permitting student visa holders in Australia upon graduation to be granted an OTV onshore to undertake practical employment experience for professional registration purposes in Australia;
- permitting student visa holders in Australia who graduate at diploma level or above to participate in a practical experience training program that is closely related to their field of study for a period of up to 12 months.

### **New Trade Skills Training Visa**

From 1 November 2005 apprentices will be able to be recruited from overseas for regional Australia under the new Trade Skills Training (TST) visa program.

The TST visa aims to address both the short and long term issue of skill shortages in regional Australia. In the short term TST visa holders will be providing necessary labour, while long term it is hoped that on successful completion of their apprenticeship they will apply for permanent residence.

TST visa holders will undertake an apprenticeship that combines both workplace-based training and classroom based learning in a regional area of Australia. TST visa holders will be required to pay for all classroom based training on a full fee basis.

To be granted a TST visa, applicants will need to have an approved Australian sponsor. Sponsors will be organisations such as an employer, local chamber of commerce, or industry associations. Sponsors will be legally responsible for the visa holder and will ensure that the visa holder abides by all training obligations and payments.